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NEWS RELEASE

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ELMORE COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$14.2 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

Last year, Elmore County residents and businesses received \$14.2 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 29,000 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Elmore County ranks number 41 in per capita investment of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$491 for every man, woman and child residing in Elmore County. This includes citizens who may not receive a single direct service from the Department. The statewide average is \$839 per capita.

The Department invested \$1.15 billion in Idaho communities in 2004. These funds came from Medicaid, additional payments to hospitals, Food Stamps, the Idaho Child Care Program, the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program, foster care and a variety of other assistance programs.

"This is an investment for all Elmore County residents," says Health & Welfare Director Karl Kurtz. "These are tax dollars put to good use because they are used to help people become healthy and productive and less dependent on government assistance. This money goes go to foster care for children in crisis, substance abuse treatment for adults and adolescents, improvements and operations at the local hospital, and dozens of other badly needed services."

"This is as much about sustaining communities as it is investing," adds Kurtz. "By providing programs that support people, we are helping communities and their residents build the endurance and strength they need to remain vital. Everyone profits from this investment, not just those who use Department programs. This isn't just me pounding my chest. That's what community leaders tell us."

Elmore County Commission Chairman Larry Rose says, “The Department plays a big part in our county. I know we would be very hard pressed to take care of a lot of people in our county if we didn’t have these services available. There are some people who wouldn’t eat without Food Stamps. Anyone young or old who can’t take care of themselves needs healthcare. It’s so important to have the Department services available.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$11 million on health care for residents of the county — \$1.6 million more than in 2003. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like Sav-Mor Drug in Mountain Home. “We have a lot of Medicaid (business), about 28 percent,” says Pharmacy Manager Tracy Cantrell. We do consider it an investment. We have three pharmacists and two techs who work full time. It pays a big chunk of our wages. Without the money, it would cause us to cutback on staff. We provide service to one retirement home and three assisted living facilities, so Medicaid is pretty important.”

The story is much the same at Elmore Medical Center. The hospital received \$366,000 in additional payments called Disproportionate Share (DSH) and Federal Upper Payment Limits. The payments are made to some hospitals which have a larger than average share of Medicaid patients. “These payments are hugely important to us,” says Hospital Administrator Greg Maurer. “The DSH is very important because we have a lot of Medicaid, and we can apply that money to our contractual adjustments. We use the payments to preserve programs and stabilize our financial situation.”

The payments are in addition to inpatient and outpatient fees paid to the hospital for care of Medicaid patients. The money can be used for any purpose, so it has the potential of benefiting anyone who uses the hospital, not just Medicaid clients. All Medicaid payments to the hospital totaled \$1.4 million last year.

Elmore County residents received \$1.3 million in Food Stamps — \$300,000 more than in 2003. Food Stamps also served nearly 1,400 people in 2004 — 200 more than in the previous year. Southside Market in Glenns Ferry redeemed almost \$50,000 of the Food Stamp dollars.

“Our annual sales are \$1.3 million,” says Janelle Owings, who owns the store along with her husband, Tom. They employ 10 people. “That \$50,000 is pretty important. I would imagine we are creating an extra job or two. There is a point at which you can cover more business with the same amount of people, but you need people in there.”

Department spending help people, and it has an upside for business, according to Idaho economist John Church. “This is not lost money. The spending is an investment. It goes back into the economy. If an employer came to town and spent this much money we would be elated. People need to remember that a big chunk of this is federal money which is a huge return on our taxes. This comes back and helps stimulate the economy and it helps people.”

Kurtz says, “Not only is the Department money a human investment, but it creates jobs and maintains healthy businesses. These dollars recycle numerous times in each community and help us keep the high quality of life we enjoy in Idaho. This is a wise use of taxpayer dollars because the money spent in the community often stays in the community. The dollars are spent again and again to help create jobs and an infrastructure that provides healthy and safe neighborhoods.”

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(**Editors:** Interviews are available on request. Contact Ross Mason at 334-0693 or Regional Director Kathleen Allyn at 344-6747 for more information.)

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<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>**